
INTERMEDIATE IMPACTS OF ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

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Introduction

The results presented here are those of a telephone survey of over 4,000 Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) recipients. The aim of the research was to test whether the provision of IAG makes a difference to the work and learning outcomes of individuals, ideally by tracking them over time (although this initial research proved more difficult and time consuming than originally envisaged, so funding is not yet secured for successive waves). The first survey was, therefore, intended as a baseline. Survey respondents were individuals aged 20 years or older, who were qualified to no more than level 2 or equivalent. The study compared recipients of Advice and Guidance with a control group of individuals receiving information only. These two groups were matched on a number of characteristics using a technique known as 'propensity score matching' in order to control for any differences between them. The survey focused on obtaining information about individuals' background, work and learning situation, and histories to include in the matching. This is so that differences between the outcomes of two groups can be attributed with more confidence to the effect of the Advice and Guidance intervention.

Key Findings

- □ The survey was successful in identifying a group of Advice/Guidance (A/G) recipients and a control group of those receiving Information (I) only, whose characteristics were broadly similar. Any slight differences were removed using propensity score matching. This is important in attributing any differences in the outcomes of the two groups to the impact of the A/G intervention.
- □ The distinction between the two groups was validated by their different patterns of service use, with A/G users having had more contact with a larger number of providers on average, having sought help with their careers or planning their future in greater proportions than I-only recipients who were more likely to be seeking help with learning.
- □ The A/G users were more positive than the I-only group about their current/previous work and learning achievements and their current labour market position. This may reflect some form of impact of the higher-level intervention they have received, but without a true baseline measure the fact that the A/G group are simply more positive about everything cannot be discounted.
- □ There are clear differences in the work and learning outcomes and in changes to the levels of confidence, motivation and opportunity awareness between the two groups. In all cases the A/G group are significantly more likely to report having undergone changes since their intervention as a result of the help they have received. This study, therefore, provides evidence that the intermediate outcomes of Advice/Guidance recipients are greater than individuals receiving Information only.

Details of the research

The sample of respondents was randomly drawn with the help of three suppliers of IAG services: *learndirect*, Jobcentre Plus and 24 IAG Partnerships (since re-branded as Nextsteps providers). These providers drew the contact details from their records of individuals using IAG services between October 2003 and March 2004. Individuals were interviewed by telephone for an average of 30 minutes. The achieved sample of 4,361 interviews includes 2,979 individuals referred by *learndirect*, 986 by IAG Partnerships and 396 by Jobcentre Plus.

Individuals were split into two groups for analysis, dependent on the nature of the help they had received. Those receiving just Information (the I-only group), and individuals who felt that they had received more than this (the A/G group). These groups were matched on a range of characteristics, including their work and learning histories, using propensity score matching. The technique was used in order to reduce any differences between the two groups. For it to be successful, all major influences on outcomes (other than A/G) should be included in the matching. The focus of the survey was, therefore, collecting as much detailed information for the purposes of matching as possible.

Respondent details

- Just over 60 per cent of the sample were female and a similar proportion were aged 35 years or younger.
- Around 20 per cent were minority ethnic respondents, and 15 per cent either had a health problem or disability and just over half had dependent children.
- Seventeen per cent of the sample were single parents and just over 40 per cent were not active in the labour market.
- Half the sample held a level 1 qualification, a quarter held level 2 qualifications and the same proportion held level 0 or no qualifications.

Following matching, the profiles of the I-only and the A/G groups were very similar on all these factors.

Learning and work histories

The majority (almost 60 per cent) of both groups are recent learners (*ie* in the last three years), and

a quarter of both the I-only and the A/G groups were in learning at the time of the survey, the majority engaged in study related to a qualification. One-tenth of respondents in both groups had been in learning throughout the three years prior to the survey and 15 per cent of both I-only and A/G recipients are new learners (*ie* they are currently learning, but have no other learning experiences in the last three years).

The main difference between the groups is that A/G recipients were more likely to be engaged in learning leading to a qualification lower than the one they already hold. This is likely to reflect the fact that a higher proportion of this group are seeking IAG support to help with job/career changes or in planning their future. The likelihood is that many of these will, therefore, be re-training, which may require them to study a course at a lower level than their existing qualifications.

Half of both groups were in paid work, with another five per cent self-employed. Around 30 per cent of both the I-only and the A/G group had been working throughout the past five years, but the remainder had experienced at least one period of unemployment in that time. The average period of current unemployment for those not in work was just over 30 months. The largest proportion of individuals currently inactive (as oppose to actively seeking work) are full-time home-based carers.

The A/G group had slightly lower annual incomes than the I-only group, with a median of £7,280 a year, compared to £7,800. The mean for both groups was just over £9,000. Around 80 per cent of both groups lived in households where at least one form of means-tested state benefit was being claimed.

Use of IAG services

Two-thirds of the I-only group and slightly more of the A/G group had used more than one source of IAG support. The main contact methods were face-to-face meetings and telephone contact. A range of providers had been utilised and the most common (aside from *learndirect*, the sampling methodology ensured that this was the most common) were advisers from schools/colleges/other education centres (38 per cent of the I-only group and 43 per cent of A/G group). Family members and friends were also a common source of advice.

The I-only group were more concerned with finding out about training and learning opportunities than the A/G group who were more likely to be planning changes to their career. A/G recipients were also significantly more likely to feel that the service delivered on these expectations or to feel that where it hadn't they had actually got something else out of the contact instead. The levels of satisfaction amongst the A/G group were also higher in relation to all aspects of the service.

Attitudes to work and learning

In order to accurately reflect changes in attitudes it is important to have a true baseline measure. This should ideally be collected prior to the IAG intervention. In practical terms, however, this is difficult if not impossible. By the time of this baseline survey, up to one year could have elapsed since their last contact with IAG services. It is likely, therefore, that some changes to attitudes had already occurred. There is no way to determine whether differences between the A/G group and I-only group already existed prior to the receipt of IAG support, or whether they have emerged as a result of the different levels of support received. Acknowledging this limitation, however, it is interesting to compare the attitudes of the two groups in relation to work and learning.

The A/G group emerge as more positive about both their work and their learning situations. They have higher levels of satisfaction with their current job (those in work) and with their achievements in current and/or past work (all those with some work history). Individuals in the A/G and the I-only groups who were unemployed but seeking work were those least satisfied with their achievements.

There were fewer differences between the two groups in relation to their attitudes towards various aspects of learning, although where there were significant differences (present in relation to three out of nine statements), the A/G group were more positive. In addition, when asked to rate their overall satisfaction with current/previous learning/training, the A/G group were again more satisfied.

Intermediate outcomes

Individuals were asked to state what changes had occurred in their lives as a result of the IAG intervention/s they had received. Individuals in receipt of A/G were more likely than those in

receipt of I-only to have made changes in relation to a whole range of attitudinal, learning and work outcomes.

A range of outcomes related to confidence and motivational levels were examined. In all cases the A/G group were more likely to consider that they had made gains in these areas, and the majority of these differences were statistically significant. The assumption is that, given time, changes to motivation and other soft outcomes will manifest themselves at a later stage in relation to changes to academic or work performance. If this cohort is re-contacted, therefore, this assumption should be tested.

The differences between the A/G and I-only groups held for people of all ages, with the exception of career planning and job search behaviours where there was no differential impact of A/G over I for older respondents. Asian respondents were also less likely to feel they had made progress on these measures, less so than any other ethnic group, but for other minority ethnic groups the picture was more complex and depended on the measure in question.

Also, individuals were asked about any changes to their work or learning situation that had already happened. There were seven work/learning outcomes which applied to more than one-third of A/G recipients and to a statistically significantly smaller proportion of the I-only group.

- Forty-five per cent of the A/G group had improved their existing skills or learnt new skills, compared to 35 per cent of the I-only group.
- Thirty-six per cent of the A/G group had enrolled on a course compared to 30 per cent of the I-only group.
- Thirty-five per cent of the A/G group were now working towards a qualification, compared to 29 per cent of the I-only group.
- Thirty-five per cent of the A/G group had learnt how to write a CV/application letter or complete an application form, compared to 23 per cent of the I-only group.
- Thirty-four per cent of the A/G group had started looking for a job, compared to 26 per cent of the I-only group.
- Thirty-four per cent of the A/G group had taken part in a training course, compared to 25 per cent of the I-only group.

- Thirty-three per cent of the A/G group had started applying for jobs, compared to 23 per cent of the I-only group.

Some of the differences between the two groups, however, did not hold for older adults (*ie* those over 50 years of age), suggesting that the beneficial impact of A/G over I holds for less outcomes for this group. If future research with this cohort goes ahead, it would be useful to re-examine these differences.

Conclusions

The research has so far been successful in identifying a sample of individuals in receipt of differing levels of IAG intervention. The control and treatment groups have also been successfully matched on a range of characteristics, allowing the differences in outcomes between the two groups to be more confidently attributed to the nature of the intervention they have received.

The attitudinal differences between the groups could reflect the positive impact of A/G over I-only, but might also suggest that the A/G group is just more positive about their situation overall. This should be monitored if future waves are commissioned as it has implications for the interpretation of results.

The majority of respondents had used more than one service provider. The A/G group had the most complex pattern of service use and had received more sessions with advisers. They were also more positive about the services they received and what they felt they had got out of the experience. From a customer satisfaction perspective, therefore, A/G users are receiving a service which is qualitatively different.

There are also very clear patterns in the data which show greater gains across all outcomes for the A/G group. They are more likely to feel they have improved their work and/or learning situation, and/or their levels of confidence, motivation and opportunity awareness. At this intermediate stage, therefore, the provision of A/G does result in more positive outcomes than offering I-only.

Additional Information

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